|  |
| --- |
| Tallwood high school |
| To what extent does the entertainment industry influence America’s assessment of society? |
|  |
|  |
| **Clifton Eure II** |
|  |

Table of Contents

1. Introduction
2. Developing an Economy
   * 1. Under what expectations do producers create films?
     2. Who determines what kind of films are generated?
     3. Where does the most influence occur in entertainment?
     4. When is entertainment most influential?
3. Influencing Politics
   * 1. How has social media impacted political situations?
     2. What changes have occurred due to the change in sources of media?
     3. Where are most political views influenced in the country?
     4. Who holds the most influence on our nation?
4. Developing “Dreams”
   * 1. How has the American dream developed over the years?
     2. In what ways can these films be interpreted?
     3. Where has the films had the most effect?
5. Creation of Stereotypes

How have stereotypes came to be?

What effects has it had on different cultures?

1. Formation of A Mass Culture

The United States has been the host to many sources of media and entertainment and the main purpose of research was to distinguish what the effects of them were. Many scholarly articles and editorials were used to support personal findings. The use of a local Media Studies instructor also gave insight on the entertainment industry. The discovery of this worldwide situation in which the entertainment industry affects society accomplished the goals of research. In result, there was found to be a he development of mass media since the 1920’s that continuously updates itself in order to suit society. This development includes film, music, television and the worldwide web. It becomes a broad topic to research if not focusing on one area and was well worth researching. The subject can be expanded for later use if another nation is chosen as a topic site. I intend to take full responsibility for anything written in this paper, it was not written to offend anyone according to race, gender, or beliefs but to only present information discovered. Thank you for your interest in the topic and I appreciate all feedback.

Introduction

Every nation has their own means of entertainment and every culture accepts only a handful of them. Today’s youth understands the entertainment industry much more in depth than the spectators of the first television. The people have looked up to their era’s entertainers for decades but the admiration has expanded from radio hits to worldwide name recognition.

When seeking to uncover what entertainment in the United States has had an effect on our society as a history, it can be said that this industry is much more powerful in our nation than just controlling the box office. Many of these creations have been used as propaganda in our country and it has lost its effect to the widespread because of the internet. Our box office blockbusters have much more effects on us than hysteria and depression as displayed during the United States of America’s recent semi recession years. Their entertainment industry has influenced its viewers since our Founding Fathers sat down to sign the constitution in a moment in life where politics was viewed as actual entertainment.

From the application of the first phonograph to the death of Apple Founder ingenious Steve Jobs, the entertainment industry’s success rate has increased surprisingly but expects to plateau within the year 2012. This prediction of a plateau has come from a period of advancement. The era of watching movies has been redefined each time a new gadget is introduced. It’s not only the United States who has come to the spotlight, but nearly every successful nation has been influenced by its entertainment industry.

Within each century, some of the world’s greatest scientists and technicians predicted a robotic world for the 2000’s. These predictions can be said to be accurate due to our progress of advancement away from many time consuming and labor essential aspects of life. The effect is that sensation of not knowing what’s next in the future. Through show business this has become possible but to what extent does the American entertainment industry influence America’s assessment of society? The extent may possibly be greater than pop culture’s impact on the world alone.

Developing an Economy

The United States sees almost any situation as an opportunity to develop economically. A lot of the big businesses have become desirous to reap profits from the working class. They have inspired many devious patterns in our entertainment industry. A movie could show a product in a scene whether it’s obvious or not and the product’s sales would climb in sequence with movie sales. David Walsh examined the mediocrity in each scene released by saying, “The entertainment industry in the US continually reveals itself to be less and less about ‘entertainment’ and more and more about ‘industry*.’* ”[[1]](#footnote-1) Entertainment created in present day Hollywood is designed specifically to attract viewers without a sincere story plot. Walsh discovered various factors that are displayed in the production of amusing movie titles and plots. One of which is described as a general cultural decline, which includes the lack of proficiency among many screenwriters and directors. The lack of natural comedy contrasts with this economic feast these directors host. Another factor Walsh presented is “the great pressure of producing a return” on the 100 million dollars and higher films in which studios then create a film with no flare or, “the film that offends or disturbs no demographic group”.1 The final factor discovered is the rightward lurch by political and media establishments resulting in the lack of taste but innovation in the box office which starts with film studio executives and almost prevents creation of material that might challenge conservative perception.

The great authors Theodor Adorno and Max Horkheimer of the Frankfurt School, published an essay titled “*The Culture Industry:Enlightenment as Mass Deception*”. The two focused on the full image of the culture industry, which can be described as “a closed system that thoroughly and carelessly dominates the population.” [[2]](#footnote-2) In the first decade of the 2000’s, the closed system could be more so the internet as a media and an entertainment source. Television still influences us as a media source but it has almost met its match with the internet’s thriving social media networks. Adorno and Horkheimer stated that, “Films, radio and magazines make up a system which is uniform as a whole and in every part... Under monopoly all mass culture is identical, and the lines of its artificial framework begin to show through. The people at the top are no longer so interested in concealing monopoly: as its violence becomes more open, so its power grows. Movies and radio need no longer pretend to be art. The truth that they are just business is made into an ideology in order to justify the rubbish they deliberately produce.”2 Even with the difference in time period and culture, many similarities still exist in our societies. The duo discovered that no independent thinking must be expected from the audience and that the product sets every reaction opposite the natural structure, but by signals. Any logical connection calling for mental effort is thoroughly avoided. As far as possible, developments must follow from the immediately preceding situation and never from the idea of the whole. For the attentive movie-goer, any individual scene will give him the whole thing.2

Entertainers in the United States have provided many gateways for movements across the nation. The level of influence our population receives from a simple approval or backing of an issue by a celebrity is almost instantaneous with results.2 Our most influential people happen to be stars in the entertainment business. In 2011, Director Steven Spielberg was named Hollywood’s most influential celebrity. Most Americans wouldn’t have him placed at the top of the list today, but he is very well respected and almost universally liked. Although today he is legend to our entertainment world, he influenced “an entire generation of filmmakers with movies like ‘Jaws’ and ‘E.T.’ And when he takes a political stance, the whole world listens.”3 Spielberg’s international influence was displayed in 2008 when he made headlines after resigning as artistic adviser to the 2008 Summer Olympics in China, because he was unable to convince Chinese authorities to provide relief to the people of Darfur Sudan. His actions had a major impact on the Olympics at that time because Spielberg actually had a major role in the final product of the Olympics. He was one of eight flag bearers at the Opening Ceremonies of the 2002 Winter Olympic Games in Salt Lake City but also the IOC President Jacques Rogge noted that "[Spielberg] certainly would have brought a lot to the opening ceremony in terms of creativity."3 An entertainer is most influential during times of social misconduct. The misconduct is usually presented as a main topic of discussion or it can be a problem that has not yet hit the fan. Spielberg’s actions are just an example of how much of an impact entertainers from any field can have on a nation.

Influencing Politics

Today in the United States politics has had a much more mass media influence. A political candidate can be represented in many forms of media due to sources available to society today. Author Steven J. Ross established a thesis on this exact situation of influence. The generation today as previously stated, social media has almost matched the role of film in the United States after President Barack H. Obama used many online media sites as a tool making it a commonality among the population. Commercials on television or the big screen no longer have as much an impact as online commercials today. “..film is arguably the most influential, lucrative, and glamorous entertainment form.”, The power of the actual film has more influence on an audience than a speech or a lecture for entertainment is propaganda in and of itself.[[3]](#footnote-3) “Film producers, directors, and the celebrities who star in films are the most powerful of all entertainers,” and when a celebrity or entertainer promotes an action, its success is groundbreaking.4 In our nation, “films, movie stars, entertainment culture, marketing, power, and politics are not distinct but integrated,” and that they have merged together over centuries of industry and product to where, Hollywood’s elite create extraordinary economic value and exercise phenomenal influence.4 These entertainers have actually taken part in politics of the country with the acceptance of our government. Their input to the state of California’s national influence and economic gain of Los Angeles is due to the power politically that movie stars deposit.

Various celebrities have been elected to power in our government including to the U.S. Senate, George Murphy; The Governor of California, America’s most populous state, Arnold Schwarzenegger, and President of the United States Ronald Reagan and the reason why Hollywood has taken a powerful role in society is because, “movie stars shape our values and the very essence of what it means to be an American. Hollywood controls, innovates, and excels in the application of the media, which over time has become ever more critical to the marketing process.”4 A very accurate statement due to the fact that Hollywood has influenced our nation ever since it came to be. The celebrities that tended to flock in this area have created a culture of California that has branded society. Economics and entertainment has always played roles in each other’s success but when the two emerge, it almost bears a resemblance to the ‘layer cake’ system in which our government can be described to have in which they were created separately but tend to influence each other. Award winning actor Marlon Brando has been quoted on observing this conjoining by saying , “If an actor can be influential selling deodorants he can be just as useful selling ideas.”, which is almost the whole idea of having an economic branch of entertainment, for which entertainers can advertise effectively. Hollywood movie stars are capable of having enormous influential power as celebrity role models, but also in connecting with audiences at an emotional level the people rarely feel about politicians. This is a very genius method of promotion which proves successful almost all of the time depending on the celebrity’s status.

Developing ‘Dreams’

The Hollywood lifestyle is often associated with the dream lifestyle, for hosting everything from your dream home to your dream job, all due to interpretations of media by society. We tend to mimic what we see celebrities doing. Americans absorb this ideology simply as their dream. Mrs. Kelly Bulkeley, Ph.D., expressed her findings on this topic in an essay where she exemplified the two classic American blockbusters ‘*The Wizard of Oz*’(1939) and ‘*Nightmare on Elm Street*’(1984) for “both of these films portray the dream adventures of an adolescent girl struggling to survive in and make sense of a world filled with danger, evil, and injustice.”[[4]](#footnote-4) Her choices in movies to evaluate are genius because these two titles are of two different genres and display two different situations. But it’s their subliminal messages that portray the same picture.

In the Wizard of Oz it basically involved a girl who found herself caught in a tornado in her hometown of Kansas which then blew her into a dream world, in which she discovers power and influence after becoming a leader to the characters she encountered. She came across many obstacles that she defeated with common sense of the real world, but in forms of surreal situations. Bulkeley believes the waking world of home and family is the best place, the place we should never wish to leave, the place towards which we should always strive to return, the moral of Dorothy’s adventure.5 The similarities between our everyday dreams and the world Dorothy discovers are apparent in order to bond with the audience much more intensely.5

‘Nightmare on Elm Street’ similarly uses the same tactics except to extract fear from the audience. In the movie, it’s based on a badly disfigured man who murders teenagers with his razor blade fingers in their dreams. The teenagers begin to investigate how they can defeat this seemingly invincible monster. What was thought to be a possible option to defeat Freddy Kreuger, soon turned into his reincarnation thus continuing the series.

But Bulkeley determined that one of the biggest differences between films and dreams is that while dreams are purely private experiences, films are collective experiences, meaning a film can only define certain aspects of reality. Mainly because we have dreams in the privacy of our own personal imagination, but we usually watch movies with groups of other people. Our interpretations of films tend to develop a pre judgment that tends to deal with real life situations. That pre judgment carried onto descriptions of people that the audience has not encountered which causes them to use caution based on ideas fed throughout the media. These cautions are known as ‘stereotypes’.

Creation of Stereotypes

A majority of Americans are impressed with American popular culture with a large minority of the public being doubtful about the quality of US movies and television, divided about the spread of American culture. Only a small percentage of Americans consider the dominance of US culture a threat to other cultures. Nationalism has created this feeling of irrelevance when another culture’s media is displayed. Although when it comes to globalization bringing greater cultural influences into the US, Americans express a positive attitude. One impact globalization has had on societies including America’s, is stereotypes. In America the stereotype of a Native American has expanded from Pocahontas to old Western set movies where they usually ran savage. The story of ‘*Pocahontas*’ has been tackled for having many lasting effects the Native American population in America. She has been unjustly portrayed in history as a supporter of the invading English settlers, thus giving her the reputation amongst American Indians as being an "apple and a sellout”.[[5]](#footnote-5) Younger Native American students who see Native Americans treated as though they are less than human beings in movie cartoons and as sports mascots, logos, and even the tomahawk chop, often assume that they are inferior compared to non- Native American children. The effects of this on the self-esteem of Native American children, when buttressed by the other factors that plague their communities - poverty, cultural dislocation, and related social ills - can be devastating.[[6]](#footnote-6)

Native Americans are not the only subject to this but for decades America’s entertainment media has defined the Asian image to all the world. And usually, that image has been shaped by people with little understanding of Asian people themselves--and with little foresight into how such images would impact the Asian American community. The normalcy in seeing an Asian face or accent is presented as a shorthand symbol for anything antithetical to American or Western culture.[[7]](#footnote-7) This depicts the lack of information most studios discover when reenacting another cultures actions. But Hollywood also created many successful interpretations. Some Hollywood movies--such as ‘Dragon: The Bruce Lee Story’ and ‘The Joy Luck Club’--have been widely accepted by Asian American audiences.8 But what usually ruins a good Asian influence is clichéd stock characters and that limited range develops how the audience will perceive Asian Americans. In result, the ‘Media Action Network for Asian Americans (MANAA)’ has come up with ways to prevent these stereotypes. They believe that Asian Americans are foreigners who cannot be assimilated due to being racially and culturally unique from America’s mainstream. This portrayal ultimately suggests that anything Asian must remain apart from American society.8 Their idea to prevent further stereotypical actions is for Hollywood to begin portraying Asians as an integral part of the United States, meaning that more portrayals of acculturated Asian Americans speaking without foreign accents.

Similarly in 1920’s America, the African American population began to reinvent entertainment for the era known as the ‘Harlem Renaissance’. Some cultural and social activists of the Harlem Renaissance targeted the emphasizing of an African Americans' ability to express and grip mainstream culture in order to show that the race wasn’t as the common stereotypes portrayed and had intellectual and cultural abilities equal to those of White Americans.[[8]](#footnote-8) Music is one area in which the achievements of the Harlem Renaissance continued long after it had formally ended in other ways. As seen in the 1940s and 50s, Harlem saw another musical upsurge in the Bebop era with people such as Charley Parker and Thelonius Monk. Even later, in the 1960s, the musical creativity of Harlem, as witnessed in many R&B performances in the Apollo Theatre, was going strong. With the increasing strength in up and coming talents, a culture of mass influence began to emerge in the states.

Formation of a Mass Culture

Our Mass Culture development occurred during the 1920’s, one of the most positive and negative economic times in America. Of all the innovative household appliances during the 1920s, none had a more revolutionary impact than the radio. “Sales of radios soared from $60 million in 1922 to $426 million in 1929. The first commercial radio station began broadcasting in 1919, and during the 1920s, the nation's airwaves were filled with musical variety shows and comedies.” [[9]](#footnote-9) Radio in the 1920s had the power in which is equivalent to today’s internet, where news and entertainment can be accessed simultaneously. Radio also dispersed many racial and cultural misrepresentations and offensive stereotypes. The nation's most popular radio show, ‘Amos 'n Andy,’ which first aired in 1926 on Chicago's WMAQ, spread vicious racial stereotypes into homes whose white occupants knew little about African Americans.10 Other minorities fared no better. The Italian gangster and the tightfisted Jew became stock characters in radio programming.9 This is an example of how the media has the ability to shape our language. The introduction of stereotypes changed the way many people interacted with minorities.

There came a time where listening became unexciting and the introduction of motion pictures attracted widespread attention. The most significant new instrument of mass entertainment was the movies. Movie attendance soared, from 50 million a week in 1920 to 90 million weekly in 1929.9 According to one estimate, Americans spent 83 cents of every entertainment dollar going to the movies, and three-fourths of the population went to a movie theater every week. 10 Today, our movie attendance is much lower due to easier ways to access recent and older films, a universal occurrence through the usage of the worldwide web.

Since the beginning of the 20th century, citizens across the globe have found discomfort in the global impact of American culture. In 1901, the British writer William Stead published a book called, ominously, *The Americanization of the World*. The title captured a set of apprehensions—about the disappearance of national languages and traditions, and the obliteration of a country’s unique ‘identity’ under the weight of American habits and states of mind—that persists until today.[[10]](#footnote-10) Article author Richard Pells discussed our most predominant culture characteristics and reveals how they are just mere imitations of what had already existed in many of his writings. One example used was how in the 20th century Hollywood became the cultural capital of the modern world, but never an exclusively American capital. Like past cultural centers—Florence, Paris, Vienna—Hollywood has functioned as an international community, built by immigrant entrepreneurs and drawing on the talents of actors, directors, writers, cinematographers, editors, composers, and costume and set designers from all over the world.11 That transformation to fit stars from global stages has increased Hollywood’s popularity and population. It’s the modernized home feeling that actually attracted our foreign population. America’s mass culture has often been crude and intrusive, as its critics have always complained. But American culture has never felt all that foreign to foreigners. And, at its best, it has transformed what it received from others into a culture everyone, everywhere, could embrace—a culture that is both emotionally and, on occasion, artistically compelling for millions of people throughout the world.11 To be a mass culture, something must influence by widespread. In which our influence is received by music and movies modern to our generation which can affect our vocabulary. Television itself has introduced many options to recreating our nation. It presents various channels which have different interests. Advertisements displayed during these shows complement the interests of the show and the viewers. Media as a mass culture is not a new issue. It’s just that media hasn’t been so massive before.[[11]](#footnote-11)

Conclusion

Media has not always been as effective as it is now. Centuries before our time, forms of entertainment influence included depictions in art and also literary work published. For example the 15th century mural titled ‘The Last Supper’ by Leonardo da Vinci may have had the same effect on its society as did Mickey Mouse had on ours. Both have had problems with censorship in other countries but both can be interpreted variously. Modernly, there is no aspect that media doesn’t concern, you can’t escape it. Socially, a person’s body image can be determined by media to a point where it is an epidemic. The fashion world would lack vitality without the usage of media. Health wise, a government can enforce many laws and regulations to promote and protect us from harmful choices. But the government has noticed that they are unable to influence us the way a song or picture can, so they have turned to using media. So to what extent does the entertainment industry influence America’s assessment of society? The answer being the highest extent possible because of the introduction of many technological advances in our generation and we are lucky enough to have freedoms documented in our constitution brought to life in forms of media. Nothing in this world has power equivalent to that of the media. If media was an energy source it could power things internationally and ironically it does empower many things internationally.

Works Cited

Adorno, Theodor, and Max Horkheimer. "The Culture Industry:Enlightenment as Mass Deception." Diacletic of Enlightenment (1944): n.pag. Print.

Alman, Leslie. “One on One interview about Media” 15 Dec. 2011 Int.

Bulkeley, Ph.D, Kelly. "From the Yellow Brick Road to Freddy’s Razor Claws: Films, Dreams, and American Society ." kellybulkeley.com. N.p., 2 Oct. 2009. Web.

Digital History. "The Formation of Modern American Mass Culture ." www.digitalhistory.uh.edu. N.p., n.d. Web.

Kura Hulanda Resorts Curacao. "Temporary: Harlem Renaissance." www.kurahulanda.com. N.p., n.d. Web.

MANAA. "Restrictive Portrayals of Asians in the Media and How to Balance Them." www.manaa.org. N.p., n.d. Web.

Pells, Richard. "Is American Culture "American"?." www.america.gov. N.p., 01 Feb. 2006. Web.

Pewewardy, Ph.D, Cornel. "Native American Mascots and Imagery: The Struggle of Unlearning Indian Stereotypes.." Journal of Navajo Education 9.1 (1991): n.pag. Print.

Pomerantz, Dorothy . "Spielberg named Hollywood's most influential celebrity ." today.msnbc.com. Forbes, 18 Jan. 2011. Web.

Ross, Steven J. "Hollywood Left and Right: How Movie Stars Shaped American politics." www.nyjournalofbooks.com. Oxford University Press, USA, 6 Sept. 2011. Web.

Walsh, David. "How "entertaining" is the American entertainment industry?." www.wsws.org. N.p., 25 Aug. 2003. Web.

Young, T. "Suicide and Homicide among Native Americans: The Medical Resources Hypothesis." American Indian Culture and Research Journal 17.4 (1993): n.pag. Print.

1. Walsh, David. "How "entertaining" is the American entertainment industry?." www.wsws.org. N.p., 25 Aug. 2003. Web. [↑](#footnote-ref-1)
2. Adorno, Theodor, and Max Horkheimer. "The Culture Industry:Enlightenment as Mass Deception." Diacletic of Enlightenment (1944): n.pag. Print. [↑](#footnote-ref-2)
3. Ross, Steven J. "Hollywood Left and Right: How Movie Stars Shaped American politics." www.nyjournalofbooks.com. Oxford University Press, USA, 6 Sept. 2011. Web. [↑](#footnote-ref-3)
4. Bulkeley, Ph.D, Kelly. "From the Yellow Brick Road to Freddy’s Razor Claws: Films, Dreams, and American Society ." kellybulkeley.com. N.p., 2 Oct. 2009. Web. [↑](#footnote-ref-4)
5. Pewewardy, Ph.D, Cornel. "Native American Mascots and Imagery: The Struggle of Unlearning Indian Stereotypes.." Journal of Navajo Education 9.1 (1991): n.pag. Print. [↑](#footnote-ref-5)
6. Young, T. "Suicide and Homicide among Native Americans: The Medical Resources Hypothesis." American Indian Culture and Research Journal 17.4 (1993): n.pag. Print. [↑](#footnote-ref-6)
7. MANAA. "Restrictive Portrayals of Asians in the Media and How to Balance Them." www.manaa.org. N.p., n.d. Web. [↑](#footnote-ref-7)
8. Kura Hulanda Resorts Curacao. "Temporary: Harlem Renaissance." www.kurahulanda.com. N.p., n.d. Web. [↑](#footnote-ref-8)
9. Digital History. "The Formation of Modern American Mass Culture ." *www.digitalhistory.uh.edu*. N.p., n.d. Web. [↑](#footnote-ref-9)
10. Pells, Richard. "Is American Culture "American"?." *www.america.gov*. N.p., 01 Feb. 2006. Web. [↑](#footnote-ref-10)
11. Alman, Leslie. “One on One interview about Media” 15 Dec. 2011 Int. [↑](#footnote-ref-11)